

Gifts

“As he looked up, Jesus saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. “I tell you the truth,” he said, “this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.”

Luke 21.1-4 (New Revised Standard Version Bible)

We found a department store in Honduras where we could buy Venancia de la Cruz and her family a housewarming gift. But what do you buy a family who lives in a mountain village without electricity and running water? We quickly discovered that Honduran department stores don't cater to poor mountain people.

Our group had traveled to Honduras in November 1999 to build a house for Venancia and her family because her home of 16 years—constructed by her husband—had washed away in Hurricane Mitch's rains in late 1998. The family escaped harm, but lived in the remains of the house until local authorities ordered them out. In a community where wages amount to \$3.50 per day, Venancia's family income barely covered the necessities.

When Venancia arrived at our work site one morning carrying a large, blue bowl filled with homemade sweet bread and an even bigger, steaming metal pot of coffee, we stopped, set down our tools, and stared in disbelief. Her daughter followed with a hodgepodge of faded plates and cracked cups under one arm and a toddler under the other arm. We were hungry and readily accepted their gifts on that day and on every other day we spent at the work site.

At the department store, we were stumped. Nothing seemed right. Several times we passed over a set of green dishes that could have replaced Venancia's faded, cracked dishes—searching instead for something brighter, something more attractive. Finally someone said, “The only reason we're not buying those green dishes is because they're not stylish enough?” Silence. “Yes,” someone else finally replied.

We returned to village, presented Venancia and her family with their house and a new set of green dishes, hoping we were capable of offering our gifts in the spirit in which she gave her gifts.

Thank you, God of all that is good, for reminding us of the place from which true gifts come.